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## **AN APPEAL TO BRITISH WOMEN**

BY

**The Earl of Meath**

AN article recently appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, headed: "Is Modern Education a Failure?" in which the writer stated that the head of a large wholesale firm had lately said: "The boys we get nowadays are not nearly so well educated as those we used to get fifteen and twenty years ago."

"Here," said the writer, "we have not the wild sayings of a faddist, or the wholesale condemnation of everything modern by a survivor of the good old days, but the testimony of an experienced business man, one who has moved among young men for over fifty years, and through whose hands hundreds of young men have passed."

Now, if the above testimony were an isolated case, we might afford to ignore it; but if we inquire of employers of labour, the answer is almost invariably the same, not only in regard to what is usually known as education, but in regard to general efficiency and reliability in the performance of all descriptions of work which need the possession of grit, and the determination to ignore temptations to idleness and to the half-performance of duty. And why is this? I venture to suggest that one reason is, that neither boys nor girls are now taught that the call of duty must be cheerfully obeyed, whether or not its due performance entails hardship or

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suffering. In our desire to give the children a good time we are weakening their moral fibre, and producing a generation of men and women which is in large measure content to shirk hard work, and to pass through life without ever making the fullest use of the powers with which it has been endowed.

There are few of us who are enamoured of hard work; we prefer ease and comfort to the strenuous life, however much we may recognise in theory its advantages to the human race. Whether we be children or adults, some external stimulus to exertion is needed if we are to make the best of our powers. Love of wife or children, ambition, the fear of hunger, and the eternal lack of pence keep most of us adults up to the mark.

As regards the children, our virile ancestors in pre-sentimental days were at no loss to discover means of encouraging them in the strenuous performance of duty. In our wish to make things easy all round, and in our kind-hearted desire to avoid all coercion, we have endeavoured to withdraw most stimuli to exertion. Mother Nature, however, declines to be a party to this sentimental policy, so that, to a certain extent, which we are rapidly doing our best to neutralise, the old primitive inducements to exertion, such as hunger and thirst, still continue to exercise their influence, but these principally operate in the case of adults. In the case of children, all stimulus is rapidly disappearing, hence the general inefficiency of which so many are complaining. It is not the fault of the teachers; it is the fault of society.

“I should be afraid to say,” says Prebendary Carlile,\* founder of the Church Army, “what proportion of the men who throng our Labour Homes can trace their downfall, in part at any rate, to parental weakness. In our prison work we meet with innumerable men and lads who need never have been in prison at all if there had

\*Duty and Discipline Series, Leaflet No. 12: “The Decay of Parental Responsibility,” by Prebendary Carlile.

been even a moderate degree of parental wisdom and control." And one of our most prominent metropolitan magistrates\* has said: "In the London police courts children are often charged with serious crimes, or with less serious offences, such as wandering, begging, etc., and often the crimes and offences are brought about by want of discipline."

Can nothing be done to stem this tide of parental neglect?

Dr. Savage,† one of our most eminent experts in nervous and mental diseases, has said that he "frequently sees the morbid mental and moral growths due to lack of early training."

The Earl of Cromer, in a letter published in the preface to this series, has pointed out the dangers to which the Empire would be exposed if English men and women were in any large numbers to lose those virile moral qualities which enabled their ancestors to build up the greatest Empire the world has ever known. He says:

"My time is so much occupied, that I fear I cannot write at any length on the very important and interesting question to which you have drawn my attention. But I wish to express my very entire sympathy with the objects which you and your coadjutors have in view.

"I trust you will not think it foreign to the subject if I add that, although we naturally have to occupy ourselves mainly with the moral training and discipline of the children of this country, the subject is very far from being British, in the strictly insular sense of the term. It is of a more far-reaching character. The greatest of all Eastern problems is to discover some means by which Western civilisation and education can be introduced into countries such as India and Egypt, without undermining the moral basis on which the whole fabric of society rests. For obvious reasons, the difficulties

\* Duty and Discipline Series, Leaflet No. 18: "A Magistrate's View of Slack Discipline," by Horace Smith, J.P.

† Duty and Discipline Series, Preface.

of finding any solution to this problem—if, indeed, it can be solved at all—are enormous; but there is one thing we can do, and ought to do, and that is to spare no efforts in order to strengthen the moral fibre of our own children, some of whom will be destined in the future to exercise, both by precept and example, an abiding influence on the characters of those large Eastern communities whose interests are, to a greater or less extent, committed to our care, and whose institutions and habits of thought are now in a state of flux and transition, which renders them highly impressionable and receptive.”

In view of the above facts, and of the opinions of those entitled to respect, I venture to make my humble appeal to British women to stem the tide of sentimental degeneracy. Why do I appeal to women? Because it is their right and privilege to mould the minds of the next generation during the earliest years of life, and because most women, whether married or unmarried, are able to influence the characters of some children. What a noble responsibility, and what a blessed privilege!

My appeal is a personal one. What efforts are *you* making to influence the rising generation, so that British citizens shall in the future be more alive than in the past to their responsibilities and duties?

Consider for a moment. Is, or is not, this Empire of ours worth preserving? If it is not, it is surely our duty to endeavour to make it worth preservation; if, on the other hand, notwithstanding all the national crimes and shortcomings, of which we are heartily ashamed, recorded by history against our race, the general beneficence of British rule makes the Empire worthy of preservation, then surely we should throw ourselves with heart and soul into the work of preparing the next generation, so that it may be able fitly to carry on the noble work commenced by its forefathers, and to bring it to a successful and glorious issue.

If the British Empire, formed, as we are told by an eminent writer, in a fit of absence of mind, has benefited

mankind, what might it not accomplish if all its citizens were trained in youth to recognise their national responsibilities, to prepare themselves for the due fulfilment of their duties, and were taught to subordinate selfish or class interests, and to regard themselves as stewards of a priceless inheritance, placed in their hands for the regeneration of the world?

This is the view of the Imperial question which I appeal to you British women to impress on the minds of the rising generation. Is it an impossible or exaggerated one? I think not; but if it be, let us remember that "Who aimeth at the sky, shoots higher much than he that means a tree." Nations live by sentiment, not by bread alone. When the vision faileth, the people perish. High ideals may not always be capable of attainment, but they are the oxygen of national life, purifying the blood, and giving health and vitality to the body corporate.

Pardon me if I venture to ask all who read these lines to make a serious study of history, should they not already have done so, to examine the causes which have led to the downfall of previous Empires, and to bring the result of their reading to bear on their actions in the training of the young, and if they arrive, as I think they will, at the conclusion that indiscipline is a danger to all civilised and stable governments, and that it is far too common amongst British children, then I would ask them to use their great influence *on the creation of a public opinion favourable to the upbringing of children in a more strenuous manner than is popular in the present day.* We need in the future men and women who are uplifted by high ideals, who have prepared their minds and bodies for the stern conflicts of life, in which victory rests, not with the soft and luxurious, but with those who have learnt to suffer and to endure for the sake of high and noble visions.

What lessons does history teach us? What does she show to have been the causes of the downfall in past ages of the mighty Empires which have preceded ours?



Have we any solid ground upon which to build the belief that the same causes which proved fatal to powerful States, which appeared at the time to be raised on indestructible foundations, will not operate in our case in a like manner as in the past, if they be permitted, unhindered, to effect a foothold within the British Empire?

Have not the principal causes of disruption in the Empires of the past been—

1. Spiritual and moral atrophy amongst individuals, leading to private and public corruption, to immorality, and to lack of public spirit?

2. The growth of enervating luxury, and the slackening of the bonds of authority and of discipline, leading to the spirit of selfishness and of anarchy, making men and women soft, weakening their minds and bodies, encouraging them to regard personal physical discomfort and pain as the greatest of earthly evils, and in their selfishness rendering them careless of the rights and wants of others, but insistent in regard to their own, and inclined to subordinate the public to personal or class interests?

3. Want of interest in and of adequate knowledge of the affairs of the Commonwealth, thus placing the masses at the mercy of clever and unscrupulous men seeking their own private interests to the detriment of the general welfare?

4. An inordinate love of pleasure, making men and women regard it as the one aim and object of life to the neglect of all serious duties?

These appear to have been the principal causes in the past of the decay of nations. Are there not signs in the present age that some of the seeds of the above causes of decay have already been sown in our midst?

In addition to the above there would in the present day seem to be a real danger lest some of the very virtues of which we are most justly proud, viz. those of compassion and of mercy, should, by an exaggerated sentimentality, lead us to relax unduly the bonds of discipline

and the restraining influences of law and of a true justice, without which society would rapidly and inevitably degenerate into an anarchy destructive of all that is best worth preserving in the world, and especially dangerous to the interests of women and to those of the weaker elements of society. In this view *I would earnestly call upon women to support the maintenance of legitimate authority, to use their influence in favour of a reasonable discipline amongst the young, both in the home and in the school*, remembering that lack of discipline in youth leads to self-indulgence in later years, creating idle, selfish pleasure-seekers amongst the richer, and tramps, loafers, corner boys, and hooligans amongst the poorer classes. Let us bear in mind that no nation can be permanently strong which is founded on the quicksands of indiscipline. Let us see to it, then, that no effort on our part be wanting to raise up a generation of men and women alive to their responsibilities, and fit in soul, mind and body to fulfil the honourable but arduous duties imposed upon them through the possession of the high privilege of British citizenship.

The assistance of loyal, patriotic British subjects of both sexes is required. Men and women, filled with an earnest missionary spirit, imbued with patriotic feeling, swayed by no idea of self-advertisement, or of self-seeking, are needed to bring the above ideas to a practical issue by the creation of a public opinion favourable to *a stricter discipline in the training of British children*.

The future of the Empire rests in the hands of the Almighty. No man, however wise, dare prophesy what will be its future, but there can be no manner of doubt amongst those who keep their eyes and ears open to the signs of the times that there are dark clouds lowering on the national horizon, which forebode in the near future no quiet and peaceful seas awaiting the good ship "Empire," but, on the contrary, storms and cyclonic disturbances of no ordinary violence. In order that she may emerge victorious from the struggle, it is needful that the

crew be brave and loyal, and be trained and hardened by discipline before the clouds break and the tempest be upon her. Who will help to provide such a crew? For with such a crew alone can she reasonably hope, under wise and skilled management, to reach in safety and with honour the haven for which she would seem to have been predestined by an omniscient and omnipotent Power.



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